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Platform Gratifications: Tinder vs. Match.com

Cassandra Lang

**Thesis submitted
to the Reed College of Media
at West Virginia University**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Journalism

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2016**

**Keywords: uses and gratifications, Tinder, Match.com, technology, social media,
applications.**

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Abstract

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This thesis examined user's experiences using dating applications by applying a uses and gratifications lens to investigate the gratifications of two different dating platforms. Specifically, this study drew upon past computer-mediated research to compare the gratifications obtained from a Tinder-like platform and a Match.com-like platform. The experiment found no significant differences between the gratifications levels of the two platforms types. However, female participants reported significantly lower levels of the "relaxation" gratification levels than males. The study also found identical ordinal gratification levels for the two platforms explored. The findings expand the study of mobile dating applications.

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Introduction

At the tip of their fingers Internet users have a multitude of features that can be used by simply downloading an application (app) to their phones or tablets. From shopping to watching television to playing games, users can download anything to satisfy nearly every need.

According to research, consumers spend 89% of their time on mobile apps accessing the Internet (Bosomworth, 2015). Of this percentage more than 50% of the time is spent on social networking, entertainment and games. In fact, even meeting a romantic partner is easier than ever before thanks to online dating websites and applications. Online dating sites and applications can shorten the process of making a connection to just one swipe.

According to Match.com, one in five relationships starts online (Match, 2013). The most popular sites are home to millions of users: OkCupid boasts 12 million (Suddath, 2014); Match.com, 21.5 million (Diffen, 2015); and eHarmony, 15.5 million (Diffen, 2015). Global Web Text reported that 91 million users (56 million males and 35 million females) use location-based dating applications and that number is rapidly growing (Plummer, 2015). One application that seems to stand out compared to other dating applications and websites is Tinder, with 50 million users (Flynn, 2015), more than twice the Match.com number. Eighty percent of the users on Tinder are between the ages of 18 and 32, and even more significant, 50% of the users are college aged (18-24) (James, 2015).

So what makes Tinder different from the rest of the dating applications? Of the many factors that differentiate Tinder, the most influential features include mobile exclusivity, young adult users, low persistence (or low desire for continuance of relationships) due to its game-like design, and physical presence (due to location-based technology). Taken together these features allow Tinder to incorporate the top three application uses (social networking, entertainment, and

gaming) in their application, which possibly contributes to its success (Bosomworth, 2015). It is been suggested that the features may also create an environment that predisposes users to casual sexual encounters. Despite this possible slight stigma, Tinder continues to grow.

One can step into a bar today and hear the people use the application as a group game, which you would not see with other dating applications. Also unlike other, older dating websites like Match.com, started in 1995, JDate (1997), Lavalife (1997), and eHarmony (2000), Tinder has been studied very little. In fact, Tinder has primarily been studied only qualitatively. By using social science to investigate the unique features that may attract users, this study aims to add to the current academic research.

Literature Review

Online Dating

In the article *Online Dating: A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science*, online dating is defined as the “practice of using dating sites to find a romantic partner” (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012, p. 7). To better clarify, dating sites and apps refer to a medium that provides an environment for romantic opportunities of both short-term casual and long-term committed relationships (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012). So online dating is done both on websites and applications that can be downloaded by users. This category of dating differs from traditional offline dating, which is conventionally meeting someone through friends, family, work, or during one’s physical, everyday life (Finkel et al., 2012). The main difference between online dating and traditional offline dating is the use of computer-mediated communication (James, 2015). It is the computer-mediated communication that allows users to connect without conventionally meeting in person. This allows for relationships to form that may not have been possible without technology.

Computer-mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication is the practice of using a digital technology to communicate with another (Herring, 1996; Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). This digital technology includes computers, tablets, phones or anything capable of Internet connection. To help explain these interactions, computer-mediated communication uses a number of theoretical frames to illustrate relationship communication. Social information processing theory, hypersonal model, and self-presentation theory best explain online romantic relationship communication (Walther, 2011). These theoretical frames explain that even though online dating lacks some non-verbal cues, intimacy can form from such online features as self-presentation, asynchronous messaging, deeper disclosure, and amount of time spent communicating (Walther 2011). Through these computer and Internet mediums and technologies, users are able to connect romantically, forming intimate relationships that can fare just as well as traditional offline relationships.

History

Using media to make romantic connections started years before computer-mediated communication was possible, with the use of personal ads in newspapers. These ads started as early as the 1700s (Whipps, 2009). In these ads, readers could post information for seeking romantic relationships. From there, romantic relationship seekers used marriage catalogues to make connections (Braziel, 2015). These posts were very similar to that of the newspapers' personal ads. When the Internet became incorporated into society, online dating began with basic social media sites, allowing users to connect, and form romantic relationships. Soon websites dedicated specifically to online dating became prevalent with sites such as Match.com in the mid 1990s (Braziel, 2015). In years to follow, dating websites grew as the Internet flourished. It was

not until 2008 that smartphones and their dating apps were added to the online dating mix (James, 2015).

Public Opinion

Finding dating partners through such media as mobile device applications or computer websites traditionally has been somewhat frowned upon in society. According to Pew Research, in 2006 it was seen by a majority of Internet users as desperate (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). In recent times, research has shown that this may be changing. The use of mobile dating applications and online dating websites has become a more popular dating medium (Smith & Duggan, 2013). In fact, “one in ten Americans have used an online dating site or mobile dating app themselves, and many people now know someone else who uses online dating or who has found a spouse or long-term partner via online dating” (Smith & Duggan, 2013, p. 1). The motivation behind these users ranges from desires for long-term relationships to easy access to new people and possible new sexual partners (Clemens, Atkin & Krishnan, 2015).

Tinder

Tinder is a location-based dating application that applies the user’s GPS location to match with others in the area. According to the Tinder website, this app allows users to swipe right with their finger to “Like” someone or left to “Pass” after evaluating others’ profiles (Tinder, 2015). Users’ profiles consist of information that comes from their Facebook account. Automatically first names and ages are added to the profile; then users can chose up to six photos to add to the profile. Depending on whom is looking at a profile, users’ common interests as well as mutual friends are displayed. Aside from the Facebook information, users have an option to add a 240-character bio and a link to their Instagram accounts (James, 2015). Tinder users can also

customize their discovery preferences: “desired age, gender, and proximity of potential matches” (James, 2015, p. 24).

After a match (or when two users swipe right or “Like” each other), they then can begin messaging. The messaging section allows users to get to know one another via instant-message technology. More recently, Tinder has added new features to their application. The first plays a role in the messaging section of the application, which would be “moments” or photographs with or without text or emojis that expire within 24 hours, but in recent updates this optional feature has been eliminated. The newest addition to the application is called “Superlike,” which allows a user to know before deciding to Pass or Like that another user has Liked them.

History

According to James’ 2015 article, Sean Rad and Justin Mateen piloted their mobile dating application, Tinder, at the University of Southern California and used their fraternity connections to promote it through “elite party schools” (Brazier, 2015, p. 15). After being funded by InterActiveCorp (IAC), the application launched in 2012 (Brazier, 2015). In May 2013, the dating application won TechCrunch’s “Best New Startup of 2013” Crunchie Award (Williams, 2013). In 2014 the dating app had reached a billion Like or Pass clicks and more than 12 million matches, with the average person spending about 90 minutes a day on the application (Bilton, 2014).

It was not until later in the year the swiping function was added. Since then other applications have been made as accessories to Tinder. These range from a heart rate swiping decision app to showing who has already liked you. In March 2015 Tinder launched its premium service for \$9.99 a month (James, 2015). The premium service gives unlimited swipes, rewind swipes, as well as the ability to swipe in other locations (James, 2015). As of November 4, 2015,

1.5 million dates stemmed from Tinder every week (1 million of these are first dates); there have been 9 billion matches in total, 30 million matches a day, 1.8 billion swipes a day (Price, 2015).

Gamification

Some critics of the application do not see it as a legitimate dating device, but rather a game (James, 2015). It is also been considered a sport, as it was used in the Olympic village during the 2014 Winter Olympics (Daily Mail Reporter, 2014). From the game-like function, users may not feel as attached to users because the technology allows them to continue to swipe through without a second thought. In James' 2015 article she explains that "the design affords little effort on the part of the user" (p. 15). This makes it attractive to the younger age group, which is not seriously looking for a connection. Jordan Crook of TechCrunch said that it is like flipping through a deck of cards waiting to see if you find a match (James, 2015).

In Love in the Time of Smartphones: A comparative analysis of the dating application 'Tinder,' Hess (2014) conducted qualitative interviews to find the behavior and thought patterns of Tinder users. In her research, she found superficiality of male responses. According to Hess's research, they focused more on appearance and direct sexual advances, whereas the females were looking for something more genuine (Hess, 2014). The difference in motivations may help explain the result found in this study that suggests that women find using dating applications more stressful. Also the fact that males developed both Tinder and Match.com may cause a gender effect. This superficiality may be explained by the game-like design that affects the users' persistence and overall seriousness when using Tinder (Roebben, 2014).

Similar to that of Hess's results, James (2015) found that users typically have shallow responses when evaluating profiles (James, 2015). This may be because of the playful, game-like design of the application (Roebben, 2014), but this shallow focus when initiating a relationship

also could lead to shallow interaction. This means that a shallow selection process, such as swiping through pictures without a consideration of others' attributes, leads to an interaction that is intentionally superficial, whether it is sexual or just ego boosting. The psychology behind the game aspect of the Tinder application is that it appeals to the current generation's desire for instant gratification (Quiroz, 2013).

Adding to the desire for instant gratification, psychologist Graham Jones explains that it is "more of a sociable activity that you can use with friends down [at] the pub rather than sitting at home on your laptop on a dating website" (Roeffen, 2014, p. 19). Epstein (2014) found in a study that Tinder is "not associated with the expectations of commitment and a long-term relationship" (p. 21) and in *New York Magazine* it explains that both men and women accept this fact (Roeffen, 2014).

Proximity

Sam Yagan, CEO of Match.com, says that Tinder marries online and offline dating in that it connects people in close proximity in current time. It is the close proximity that also plays a role in the casualness and success of Tinder. In Keitzman's 2011 article, it defines presence, or the users' availability to others, as one of social media's functions. Through GPS technology, Tinder demonstrates the function of presence through a sense of intimacy due to the closeness of one another (Keitzman, 2011). This is due to the "connection between space and sociality"; even though a physical body is not present, people can still spatialize each other on a map as well as cognitively (Brazel, 2015 p. 21). Although Tinder being associated with casual sex may be disdained by some, John Lisi and other Internet psychologists explain that it actually mirrors that of real world dating in terms of intention, interaction, and attraction (Roeffen, 2014).

Roffen (2014) also looked at a theoretical view on “nearness” or proximity, which, he says, for Tinder plays a big role. In James’ (2015) research, users were attracted to the location-based capacities because they were able to meet with someone immediately. This nearness or presence creates and manages intimacy and immediacy (Kietzmann, 2011). Not only does the app create presence from the specified miles from each other, but by listing mutual friends and interests it creates a connection and psychological nearness as well. “The sense of social nearness is very much stimulated in the structure of Tinder by not showing any rejection from other users. This way, the app provides a safe basis for its users to form rich online interaction” (Roffen, 2014, p. 16). This means that presence and the no-rejection aspect make the interaction even more substantial. Using a GPS location and distance apart, Tinder successfully creates virtual presence.

Mobility Exclusivity

Unlike the traditional dating websites, which are based primarily online, Tinder is based on a mobile platform. This allows users the freedom to create profiles, swipe through users, or interact by “Liking,” “Passing,” and messaging wherever they may be. According to Baym (2015) in *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, the mobile device acts as a “paradigm case of mobility,” meaning that regardless of location and time, communication is still possible (p. 11). Users are easily capable of maintaining interactions and relationships made on Tinder via on a mobile phone in comparison to other dating sites that need a computer to access profiles. The mobility exclusivity allows the successful use of location-based technology.

Uses and Gratifications

In *Uses and Gratifications of Social Media: A Comparison of Facebook and Instant Messaging*, Quan-Haase and Young (2015) explain that uses and gratifications theory focuses on what users

do on media to satisfy a specific need, compared to other theories that study the influence/impact media has on the individual. In other words, the uses and gratifications theory aims to gather information on *why* people use certain mediums rather than *how* the medium influences their actions. This theory seems to predict the habits and the satisfaction of media consumers.

Much of this theory started from researchers studying the descriptive information that could designate the gratifications different media produced including motives and media selection patterns (Ruggiero, 2000). One of the first studies to investigate the uses and gratifications of a specific medium was conducted in 1944, when Herta Herzog studied the gratifications of people who listened to radio soap operas (James, 2015). She found that listeners got an emotional, wishful thinking and learning reaction when they would tune in to them (James, 2015).

Following Herzog's initiation of the study of uses and gratifications, Berelson followed in 1949, when he studied the gratifications of newspapers and found that readers had "a sense of respite, social contact, social prestige, and [it] brought structure to one's daily routine" (James, 2015, p. 18). Since these behavioral studies were primarily used to classify responses into gratification categories and were lacking a predictive theoretical backbone, many people criticized the theory (Ruggiero, 2000).

The theory from there began to be dominated by the continued study of traditional media, including television (Quan-Haase & Young, 2015). It was during this time that researchers were able to identify and operationalize variables that were studied as gratification consumption patterns (Ruggiero, 2000). They studied a wide range of topics during this time from reasons for consumption to race effects on gratification (Ruggiero, 2000).

The theory went on to propose that television and radio habits could be labeled ritualistic with consistent, instrumental behavior (James, 2015). This type of behavior is action to satisfy a need. Both television habits and radio habits resulted in gratifications of arousal, escape, learning, social interaction, and companionship (James, 2015). It was during this time, the theory began to have a functionalist perspective, meaning researchers took the approach to see how the mass media and listeners/viewers worked together (Ruggiero, 2000).

Pushing ahead into the 1970's the theory began to fill in missing research and narrow the theory's definition. During this time, researchers continued studying the interaction between the mass media and the public, but they focused on identifying gratifications obtained and gratification outcomes (Ruggiero, 2000). This was done as a response to the criticism to the theory. The critics had four main points in their argument against the uses and gratification theory: a vague conceptual framework, a lack of precision in major concepts, a confused explanatory apparatus, and a failure to consider audiences' perceptions of media content (Ruggiero, 2000).

To refine the understanding of the theory, it was narrowed to the idea that users have certain basic social needs produced by different environments (Ruggiero, 2000). From these needs, users search for gratifications or non-gratifications (negative gratifications) to satisfy them in media and other activities. Once the users fulfilled their needs, it has an impact on society and social environment and new needs are created, so the circle starts again (Ruggiero, 2000). Researchers continued to refine and define the aspects of the theory. As time went on and technology changed, the uses and gratifications theory was used to explain the switch to new media (Quan-Haase & Young, 2015).

Researchers were still trying to advance the theory, when Windahl argued that past research focused on the perspective from communication or the media rather than the consumer or audience (Ruggiero, 2000). It is Wundahl's approach that is the link between past and current research (Ruggiero, 2000). Once the Internet was introduced, the theory was used to help researchers understand what users did with it and what they expected from websites, and its test inquiry has generated much study (e.g. Charney & Creenberg, 2001; Chou & Hsiao, 2000; Dimmick, Kline & Stafford, 2000; Eighmey & McCord, 1998; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Flanagan & Metzger, 2001; Kaye, 1998; Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999; LaRose, Mastro & Eastin, 2001; Lin, 1999; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Parker & Plank, 2000; Perse & Greenberg-Dunn, 1998; Song, LaRose, Fastin & Lin, 2004; Stafford & Stafford, 2001) . One recent study found the main gratifications of the Internet included access to information and content, successfully exploring and finding information, and working on social connections (James, 2015).

As the Internet transitioned into Web 2.0, the users' needs also shifted. This is when social media was added to the mix. In *Why People Use Social Media: A Uses and Gratifications Approach* (2013), social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (p. 363). During this time interactivity and user creation/collaboration became important. Quan-Haase & Young (2015) found that these features became prominent in users' uses and gratifications of online social media. Specifically in Whiting's and William's (2013) and Ligtenber's (2015) studies, six gratifications were identified. The researchers defined these gratifications as follows:

Social Interaction—“using social media to communicate and interact with others”

(Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

Pass Time—“using social media to occupy time and relieve boredom” (Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

Entertainment— “using social media to provide entertainment and enjoyment” (Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

Relaxation— “using social media to relieve day-to-day stress” (Whiting, 2013, p. 365)

Self-esteem Boosting— using social media to obtain positive feedback from others (Ligtenber, 2015)

Convenience Utility— “providing convenience or usefulness to individuals” (Whiting, 2013, p. 365)

This study focuses on the gratifications aspect of the uses and gratifications theory and aims to understand what enjoyment users gain while interacting with two different online dating platforms.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

To investigate the gratifications of different dating platforms this study drew upon pervious computer-mediated research, as summarized below, to test various gratifications using the hypotheses that follow:

According to the gratification features found in previous research and Tinder specific features of gamification and location-based technology, it is predicted that:

H1: The Tinder platform will produce an overall higher gratification than the Match.com platform.

The dating application Tinder is about connecting people, and due to its mobility users can connect anywhere at any time. From the location-based technology, users are able to meet

immediately since users can be within a few miles from one another (Bayme, 2015; James, 2015). Therefore, H1a predicts the following:

*H1a. The Tinder platform will produce a higher **social interaction** gratification level than the Match.com platform.*

In the research it has been found that users spend up to 90 minutes a day on the application, Tinder (Bilton, 2014). This large amount of time has been attributed to the game-like design that the dating app employs (Bosomworth, 2015). Therefore, H1b predicts the following:

*H1b. The Tinder platform will produce a higher **passing of time** gratification level than the Match.com platform.*

Tinder's game-like design has been associated with user enjoyment and entertainment (Bosomworth, 2015). Therefore, H1c predicts the following:

*H1c. The Tinder platform will produce a higher **entertaining** gratification level than the Match.com platform.*

With little effort involved when using Tinder, the rhythmic card-swipe design, and the lack of rejection, the dating application experience becomes second nature and may reduce stress (James, 2015; Bosomworth, 2015; Roeffen, 2014). Therefore, H1d predicts the following:

*H1d. The Tinder platform will produce a higher **relaxation** gratification level than the Match.com platform.*

Due to the card-like game that the app mirrors, users are not confronted with the rejection because the design only celebrates making a match or winning (Roeffen, 2014; TeachCrunch, 2015). Therefore, H1e predicts the following:

*H1e. The Tinder platform will produce a higher **self-esteem boosting** gratification level than the Match.com platform.*

According to a number of Internet psychologists Tinder mirrors real world dating by connecting people based on proximity, but through a medium that promotes mobility and a design that affords little effort from the user (Roeffen, 2014; Baym, 2015; James, 2015). Therefore, H1f predicts the following:

*H1f. The Tinder platform will produce a higher **convenience** gratification level than the Match.com platform.*

In a study it was found that women in their 20s were more active on social media sites compared to men (Hoffman, 2008). This research, led to research questions related to gender, as follows:

RQ1: Will there be a difference observed in gratification levels (specifically and overall) between genders using the two platforms?

RQ2: Will there be a difference observed in gratification levels (specifically and overall) between gender across both platforms combined?

Method

To test the hypotheses and answer the research questions, this study used some of the gratifications found in Whiting's and Williams' (2013) *Why People Use Social Media: A Uses and Gratifications Approach* and Ligtenber's (2015) research. Specifically it explored 1) social interaction, (2) pass time, (3) entertainment, (4) relaxation, (5) self-esteem boost, and 6) convenience utility.

For a solid understanding of the gratifications, this study employed the operational definitions formulated in Whiting's and William's (2013) and Ligtenber's (2015) studies. These definitions appeared in the literature review and also appear below:

Social Interaction—"using social media to communicate and interact with others"
(Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

Pass Time—“using social media to occupy time and relieve boredom” (Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

Entertainment—“using social media to provide entertainment and enjoyment” (Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

Relaxation—“using social media to relieve day-to-day stress” (Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

Self-esteem Boosting— using social media to obtain positive feedback from others (Ligtenber, 2015)

Convenience Utility— “providing convenience or usefulness to individuals” (Whiting, 2013, p. 364)

To test if users find greater levels of gratifications using the app Tinder over Match.com, an experiment was conducted. This experiment involved a sample Tinder profile and a sample Match.com profile (see Appendix D and E, respectively) and used a Likert scale (1 to 7) to measure the levels of gratifications obtained (see Appendix F). Two questions were used to assess each of the six gratifications. The experiment was administered at West Virginia University Reed College of Media using student participants due to cost and time constraints (Wimmer, 2014).

Pretest

A pretest was conducted to help ensure validity of the study’s procedures and materials as an initial manipulation check; the alpha across gratifications was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .79. The two questions used to measure each of the six gratifications were also tested for reliability; all resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha above .70, which is the acceptable level of agreement (Wimmer, 2014). An independent t-test was run to determine any differences between the index means and each of the gratification means. Although none of these results was

statistically significant, the differences in the platform means showed promise. Due to the small sample size and results that approached significance, plus a tight research timeframe, a decision was made to move ahead with the study. In addition, male and female gratification means overall were compared, with some statistically significant differences. Following the pretest, a gratification that was too similar to the “social interaction” gratification was changed to “self-esteem boosting,” missing wording was corrected, and the order of materials distribution was changed.

Experiment

The experiment was composed of four profiles, drawn from models that had public access photos available. The same male and female models were used to make the Tinder and Match.com profiles. The profiles were created to simulate the features and the experience of each dating app. The experiment began by requiring participants to read a scene that allowed them to understand the nature of the situation if they were to actually use the specific application. This scenario can be seen in Appendix C. They then had an opportunity to interact and view one of the profiles that were provided (see Appendix D or E).

Independent Variables: Dating Platform (Tinder or Match.com)

Dependent Variables: Gratifications obtained from the platform (social interaction, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, self-esteem boosting, and convenience utility)

To measure the overall gratification, an index was created, which is the sum of the individual gratification measures divided by the number of gratifications.

Sample

One hundred participants were selected from high capacity courses, allowing for as much of a variety of ages as possible. Participants were randomly assigned to the Tinder or Match.com

condition. Reed College of Media professors (teaching JRL 101) gave access to their classes for recruitment (for extra credit). The number of participants was calculated from the two independent variable conditions (Match.com and Tinder), with a desired goal of 50 participants per condition (Wimmer, 2014).

Data Interpretation

The gratifications questions were measured based on participants' answers to a seven-point Likert scale ranging from entirely disagree (1) to entirely agree (7). To analyze these responses the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed. A t-test was used to test for overall differences between the two conditions' index means. To analyze the individual gratifications, a t-test was used to compare each gratification mean between the two conditions.

Results/Analysis

Descriptive

To fully understand the sample, the demographics were studied first. Due to the nature of the study, few demographic details were obtained. The two demographic traits that the experiment asked were the participants' ethnicity and gender. While gender was included as part of the research question, ethnicity was included in the questionnaire for possible exploration when it came to the participants' judgment about the hypothetical profiles. However, the small Ns (see Table 1) prevented any further analysis of possible ethnicity influence.

To begin the analysis, the diversity among the participants was examined. Of the sample (N = 100), 58 were female and 42 were male with a predominantly White/Caucasian ethnicity (83%). The spread of all ethnicities and genders can be seen in Table 1 below. The breakdown of the participants' gender and platform stimuli appear in Table 2 below. Out of the 58 females, 31 interacted with the hypothetical Tinder scenario while 27 interacted with the hypothetical

Match.com scenario. On the opposite side, 19 of the 42 male participants interacted with the Tinder scenario and 23 interacted with the Match.com scenario. Table 2 illustrates these numbers.

Table 1: Ethnicity and Gender of Participants

	<i>African American</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>White/Caucasian</i>	<i>Hispanic American</i>	<i>Native American</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Female</i>	3	0	49	2	0	2	2	58
<i>Male</i>	4	1	34	1	0	2	0	42
<i>Total</i>	7	1	83	3	0	4	2	100

Table 2: Platform and Gender of Participants

	<i>Tinder</i>	<i>Match.com</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Female</i>	31	27	58
<i>Male</i>	19	23	42
<i>Total</i>	50	50	100

Inferential

To test the hypotheses and answer the research questions for each individual gratification, an overall index were obtained for Tinder, Match.com, and both platforms together. A Cronbach's alpha reliability test was employed to determine the reliability of the two questions used to assess each of the six gratifications as well as the overall gratification index. While most of the gratifications were above the acceptable .70 level, the self-esteem boosting gratification reliability resulted in Cronbach alpha score of .296. Neither of the two questions used to assess the self-esteem boosting gratification resulted in a sufficient alpha for the index. Therefore, this gratification was excluded, resulting in an index of .877. Table 3 contains the Cronbach's alpha reliability scores.

Table 3: Reliability of Gratification Questions

	<i>Index</i>	<i>Social Interaction</i>	<i>Passing of Time</i>	<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>Relaxation</i>	<i>Self- Esteem Boosting</i>	<i>Convenience</i>
Reliability	.874* .877*	.764	.861	.825	.830	.296	.874

**The first index reliability (.874) includes self-esteem boosting, but after it was dropped from the index and analysis, the index alpha = .877*

To test the hypotheses the average level of satisfaction was taken for each gratification as well as an index of all six gratifications together. Once the means for each platform were calculated, the differences in the means were tested using t-tests. There was no significant difference in the gratification index scores for Tinder and Match.com conditions; $t(94) = 0.716$, $p = 0.757$, nor for any of the five gratifications, social interaction gratification; $t(98) = .70$, $p = 0.243$, passing of time gratifications; $t(95) = .956$, $p = .829$, entertainment gratifications; $t(97) = .463$, $p = .323$, relaxation gratification; $t(98) = .812$, $p = .209$, convenience gratification; $t(98) = .641$, $p = .262$. Tables 4 show the exact means and p-values for the index and each of the five gratifications. Therefore, H1 was not supported.

The means and t-test p levels are shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Comparison of Platform Means

	Platform	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-Value
Convenience	Match.com	50	5.330	.988	.523
	Tinder	50	5.210	.881	
Relaxation	Match.com	50	4.220	1.213	.419
	Tinder	50	4.020	1.249	
Entertainment	Match.com	49	5.418	.991	.645
	Tinder	50	5.310	1.312	
Passing time	Match.com	50	5.880	.866	.342
	Tinder	47	5.670	1.270	
Social	Match.com	50	6.310	.775	.485
	Tinder	50	6.200	.795	
Index	Match.com	49	5.420	.684	.476
	Tinder	47	5.304	.896	

After the hypotheses were tested, the research questions were explored. As with the hypotheses, the research questions were studied by examining the differences in means, but instead of comparing the platforms, gender was compared. For these results they were broken down into 3 groups. Once the means for both males and females were found, the significance of mean difference was tested.

Genders were compared in the Tinder condition using t-tests: the overall index means and individual gratifications means (Table 5). There was no significant difference in the index scores between females ($M = 5.23$, $SD = .91$) and males ($M = 5.34$, $SD = .64$) conditions; $p = .620$. There was no significant difference in any of the five gratifications means of male and female Tinder users. Means and p values are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Comparison of Gender and Tinder Means

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-Value
Convenience	Female	31	5.097	.831	.267
	Male	19	5.395	.951	
Relaxation	Female	31	3.984	1.393	.781
	Male	19	4.079	1.004	
Entertainment	Female	31	5.226	1.437	.544
	Male	19	5.447	1.104	
Passing time	Female	30	5.600	1.386	.594
	Male	17	5.794	1.062	
Social	Female	31	6.242	.717	.661
	Male	19	6.132	.926	
Index	Female	30	5.233	.913	.620
	Male	16	5.349	.647	

Gender was then compared with the gratification levels in the Match.com conditions using t-tests: overall index and individual gratifications. Again, there was no significant difference in the index scores for female ($M = 5.38$, $SD = .59$) and male ($M = 5.38$, $SD = .71$) overall; $p = .975$, or social interaction scores for females and males; $p = .141$, nor for passing of time; $p = .807$, or for entertainment gratification; $p = .732$. However, there was a significant difference in the relaxation mean scores for females ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.19$) and males ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.11$) conditions; $p = .018$, but no significant difference in the convenience gratifications for female and male; $p = .309$. These results appear in Table 6 below

Table 6: Comparison of Gender and Match.com Means

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-Value
Convenience	Female	27	5.463	.970	.309
	Male	23	5.174	1.006	
Relaxation	Female	27	3.852	1.191	.018*
	Male	23	4.652	1.112	
Entertainment	Female	27	5.463	1.009	.732
	Male	22	5.364	.990	
Passing time	Female	27	5.852	.864	.807
	Male	23	5.913	.887	
Social	Female	27	6.463	.664	.141
	Male	23	6.130	.869	
Index	Female	27	5.383	.587	.975
	Male	21	5.377	.712	

*significant at the .05 level

Gender and total gratifications from both platforms were compared, using both the overall index and individual gratifications (see Table 7 below). There were no significant differences in the index scores for the gratification across of both platforms for female and male $t(92) = .391, p = .688$, and no significant difference in the social interaction gratification; $t(98) = -1.353, p = .999$. Likewise, no significant differences in the passing of time gratification; $t(95) = 0.641, p = .506$, entertainment gratification; $t(97) = 0.278, p = .775$, or convenience gratification: $t(98) = .035, p = .971$. However, significance was approached in the relaxation mean scores for the gratification across both platforms between females ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.29$) and males ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.09$); $t(98) = 1.914, p = .052$.

Table 7: Comparison of Gender and Combined Platforms Means

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-Value
Convenience	Female	58	5.267	.909	.971
	Male	42	5.274	.977	
Relaxation	Female	58	3.922	1.294	.052
	Male	42	4.393	1.091	
Entertainment	Female	58	5.336	1.251	.775
	Male	41	5.402	1.032	
Passing time	Female	57	5.719	1.165	.506
	Male	40	5.863	.954	
Social	Female	58	6.131	.884	.999
	Male	42	6.131	.696	
Index	Female	57	5.304	.773	.688
	Male	37	5.365	.676	

Discussion

This study aimed to broaden the research that has been done on the dating application Tinder. Specifically the study examined the platform gratifications between Tinder and Match.com because of Tinder's unique gamification feature, location based technology, and mobility. The study of these features could prompt future research and aid in application development. The gratifications that were studied in the experiment include social interaction, passing of time, entertainment, relaxation, self-esteem boosting, convenience, and overall index across gratifications.

From the results of this experiment, the hypotheses were not supported. While it was predicted that the Tinder scenario would have a higher satisfaction response across all

gratifications, the results showed a pretty even satisfaction with no significant differences in means between the platforms. Although the gamification, location-based technology and the mobility features of Tinder are different from Match.com, they do not seem to produce higher levels of user gratifications. Although the features cannot be used to explain the rapid success of the dating application Tinder, the target audience for each platform may be the determinant. As noted previously the average age for Match.com is 35-49 years old compared to Tinder's 18-24 (James, 2015; Match.com, 2013). This difference in average age may affect the adoption of a dating application and the intent of users.

Although the hypotheses were not supported, with no significant differences between the two platforms, the results did show that everyone most highly agreed on gratifications obtained from the "social interaction" gratification in both Tinder ($M=6.20$) and Match.com ($M=6.31$) conditions. Overall both platform's index gratifications were on the positive side. Other than relaxation, which had a neutral response from both Tinder ($M=4.02$) and Match.com ($M=4.22$) conditions, all individual gratifications had positive agreement from participants. However, when the relaxation gratification was broken down by gender to answer the research questions, female participants slightly disagreed with the relaxation statements ($M=3.92$). Not only does this allow for dating application companies to further explore ways to make the experience more relaxing for female users, but this may help mobile dating application companies market their products. By using these gratifications that were rated positively to showcase the application, they may help reduce any stigma that popular culture has casted on online dating. Both male and female gratification levels for relaxation were close to neutral, with females rating it lower; however, the results were significantly different in the Match.com platform, perhaps due to participants'

perceptions that the platform is used by people with more serious, i.e. long-term, relationship intentions..

Table 8 ordinally lists Tinder and Match.com gratifications means from most positively (1) to most negatively (6). Their identical alignment suggests that, in general, dating applications' provide the highest gratifications (at least among those examined in this study) from social interactions, with the next four gratifications closely following.

Table 8: Ordinal List of Platform Gratifications' Means

	<i>Tinder (Means)</i>	<i>Match.com (Means)</i>	<i>Gratifications</i>
<i>1</i>	6.200	6.310	<i>Social Interaction</i>
<i>2</i>	5.670	5.880	<i>Passing of Time</i>
<i>3</i>	5.310	5.418	<i>Entertainment</i>
<i>4</i>	5.210	5.330	<i>Convenience</i>
<i>5</i>	5.143	5.163	<i>Self-Esteem Boosting*</i>
<i>6</i>	4.020	4.220	<i>Relaxation</i>

*Although excluded from the index scores, the self-esteem gratification was added to the ordinal list.

The research questions asked if there would be gender differences observed in gratification levels between the two platforms and across both. The results showed that the only significant gender difference appeared with the relaxation gratification, as noted above, in the Match.com platform and across both platforms, but not within the Tinder platform. The disagreement with relaxation by females may mean that using Match.com or any other dating application is more stressful for them than their male counterparts. Although there could be numerous reasons as to why, it may be because women find using dating applications more stressful due to societal pressures. That is, women using a dating application to meet someone may be more embarrassing because of the possible social judgment from outsiders. Secondly women may find meeting new men on dating applications risky. They could be fearful of physical or other harm. Thirdly, the fear of rejection may cause women to be more stressed than

men. Lastly, keeping up self-presentation (keeping up appearances, showing their intelligence, showing their personality) on a platform also may cause women more stress since they may be more directly, and perhaps more heavily, judged for physical traits they showcase. However, these speculations were not tested in the current study, but could give way for future research. All other gender differences were not statistically significant.

Limitations

In the current study some limitations became apparent over the course of the research. One limitation was the participants' ages of the participants (18-24 years old) (James, 2015). From previous research, it shows that more than 50% of Tinder users are of the same age, but Match.com users in that age group represent fewer than 25% (Match.com, 2013). The experiment data showed that 34% of participants used or knew someone who used Match.com and 93% of participants used or knew someone who used Tinder. This difference is a limitation because the students participating in the experience may have used Tinder before. This use may have biased the gratifications that a participant obtained from the current experiment, although no difference between the two platforms emerged.

With this college-aged group, which participated in the experiment for extra credit, the attention paid to the experiment may have affected the results. Future studies should include a question at the end that indicates the level of attention. In addition, a manipulation check should be used to help ensure there are indeed perceived differences between the two platforms from the onset.

The reliability of the questions used for the gratification self-esteem boosting was a limitation of the study. The reliability of the two questions resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .296. This shows that the two questions used to represent the self-esteem boosting gratification

were not measuring the same construct. With this result the index reliability was recalculated without the self-esteem boosting gratification. A test was run to see if one or the other self-esteem boosting gratification questions could be used, but they both resulted in lower index reliability.

Although this was an exploratory study, the number of confounding variables that could affect the results is also a limitation. Due to time and cost constraints, a written scenario with paper visuals was used to simulate the different dating applications. While each scenario was made as similar as possible, the number of small details made it hard to adequately represent the few unique platform features responsible for the gratifications. Some of those details include time, environment, independent interaction, etc. Using these for the experiment might have lost a valuable part of the experience at interacting on a mobile device.

The uniformly high means across both platforms may have been caused by the “ceiling effect,” where a scale does not have enough variance to fully capture the true levels. A 9- or 10-point scale may have fixed this problem.

In further analysis of the results, in the section that compared gender gratifications of Tinder (Table 5-7), there was a significant difference in the number of male responses to female responses. Tinder female responses were overrepresented ($F=30$; $M=16$). This large discrepancy in the number of males to females may have affected the results of that section. Also in regards to the gender variables, future students should do more high-level analyses to explore the gender relationship in greater depth.

Future Research

For future research on the topic of dating application, there are a number of directions that may be pursued. First, from the results of this study, future researchers can examine what causes

females more stress than males when using a dating application. In addition, the self-esteem boosting questions used in the current experiment are not compatible with the others used in this study, which were previously validated and validated again in this study. Age differences and their impact on gratifications obtained could be an important area for future research consideration. Also future research may create an experiment where the application features are more controlled and realistic (i.e. digital). By controlling the features, they might then better suggest what specific gratifications come from each specific feature.

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Appendix A: Consent Form**Only Minimal Risk
Consent Information Form (without HIPAA)**

Principal Investigator	Diana Martinelli
Department	Reed College of Media
Protocol Number	1602018721
Study Title	Platform Gratifications: Tinder vs. Match.com
Co-Investigator(s)	Cassandra Lang
Sponsor (if any)	N/A

Contact Persons

In the event you experience any side effects or injury related to this research, you should contact Dr. Diana Martinelli at diana.martinelli@mail.wvu.edu or Cassandra Lang at clang2@mix.wvu.edu. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, you can contact Dr. Diana Martinelli at Diana.martinelli@mail.wvu.edu or Cassandra Lang at clang2@mix.wvu.edu.

For information regarding your rights as a research subject, to discuss problems, concerns, or suggestions related to the research, to obtain information or offer input about the research, contact the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at (304) 293-7073.

In addition if you would like to discuss problems, concerns, have suggestions related to research, or would like to offer input about the research, contact the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at 304-293-7073.

Introduction

You have been asked to participate in this research study, which has been explained to you by Cassandra Lang. Dr. Diana Martinelli from the College of Media at West Virginia University and Cassandra Lang are conducting this study in order to fulfill the requirements for the Reed College of Media's Master of Science of Journalism Degree.

Purpose(s) of the Study

You have been invited to participate in this research study, which involves reading a hypothetical situation and looking at information that you might see on an online dating site. The purpose of this study is to measure your reactions to the materials you see through a survey. The findings of this study could help guide future research and development about mobile application, platform design, and user experiences. WVU expects to enroll approximately 100 subjects; a total of approximately 100 subjects at all sites are expected to participate in this study.

Description of Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be offered a time in Martin Hall or at Evansdale Crossing to receive a randomly assigned packet of information. You will be asked to read the hypothetical situation and look at dating profiles that mimic what you might find on an online dating site. The profiles are designed to include features that popular dating

applications use. After viewing the hypnotical profiles, you will be asked to answer questions on a survey about your enjoyment/ satisfaction from the experience.

Risks and Discomforts

We do not anticipate any negative consequences from your participation, although you may feel uncertain or slightly uncomfortable answering the follow-up questions. You do not have to answer every question and may quit the study/survey at any time.

Alternatives

You do not have to participate in this study.

Benefits

There are no known benefits from participating in this study.

Financial Considerations

You will earn extra credit for participating in this study. Other options are available for earning the same extra credit.

Voluntary Compensation

If you are injured as a result of this research, treatment will be available. Responsibility for this treatment will be borne by: 1) the sponsor; 2) the insurance company; OR 3) by you. [Select all applicable parties] In the event that you are physically injured as a result of participating in this research, care will be available. You will, however, be responsible for the charges for the care. There is no commitment to provide any compensation for research-related injury. You should realize, however, that you have not released this institution from liability for negligence. Please contact the investigators, Dr. Diana Martinelli at diana.martinelli@mail.wvu.edu or Cassandra Lang at clang2@mix.wvu.edu if you are injured or for further information.

Confidentiality

Any information about you that is obtained as a result of your participation in this research will be kept as confidential as legally possible. Your research records and test results, just like hospital records, may be subpoenaed by court order or may be inspected by the study sponsor or federal regulatory authorities (including the FDA if applicable) without your additional consent.

In addition, there are certain instances where the researcher is legally required to give information to the appropriate authorities. These would include mandatory reporting of infectious diseases, mandatory reporting of information about behavior that is imminently dangerous to your child or to others, such as suicide, child abuse, etc.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. Refusal to participate or withdrawal will not affect your class standing or grades, and will involve no penalty to you. Refusal to participate or withdrawal will not affect your future care, or your employee status at West Virginia University.

In the event new information becomes available that may affect your willingness to participate in this study, this information will be given to you so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to continue your participation.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and you have received answers concerning areas you did not understand.

Upon signing this form, you will receive a copy.

I willingly consent to participate in this research.

Signatures

Signature of Subject

Printed Name	Date	Time
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The participant has had the opportunity to have questions addressed. The participant willingly agrees to be in the study.

Signature of Investigator or Co-Investigator

Printed Name	Date	Time
--------------	------	------

Appendix B: Experiment

This is an experiment for a master's thesis. All information will be kept confidential, however you must print your name in the space below to receive extra credit from your professor. This cover will be turned in separately from the rest of the experiment. The research will then give the extra credit forms to the participating instructor. The participants' responses will not be linked to his/her name.

Thank you.

Name:

Course:

Date

Appendix C: Platform Scenarios

Scenario 1

Please choose a platform design in the envelope that aligns with your sexual preference then read the following situation.

You decide to sign up for a dating site. In order to sign up you are asked a number of questions about your personality, physical appearance, and faith as well as what you are looking for in a partner's personality, physical appearance, and faith. The questions take about 20 minutes.

After the site then provides compatible options for you. In a grid like design you are able to delete or message someone. You appear in the same format on their device. You continue to look through the profiles which are very detailed with information about the person and what they are looking for in a partner in terms of body type, height, age, religious preference, marital status, children, smoking and drinking habits, and education.

While you have messages from potential partners you decide to message someone. A conversation is started and a date is planned.

Once finished please answer the questions on the next page based on your experience.

Scenario 2

Please choose a platform design in the envelope that aligns with your sexual preference then read the following situation.

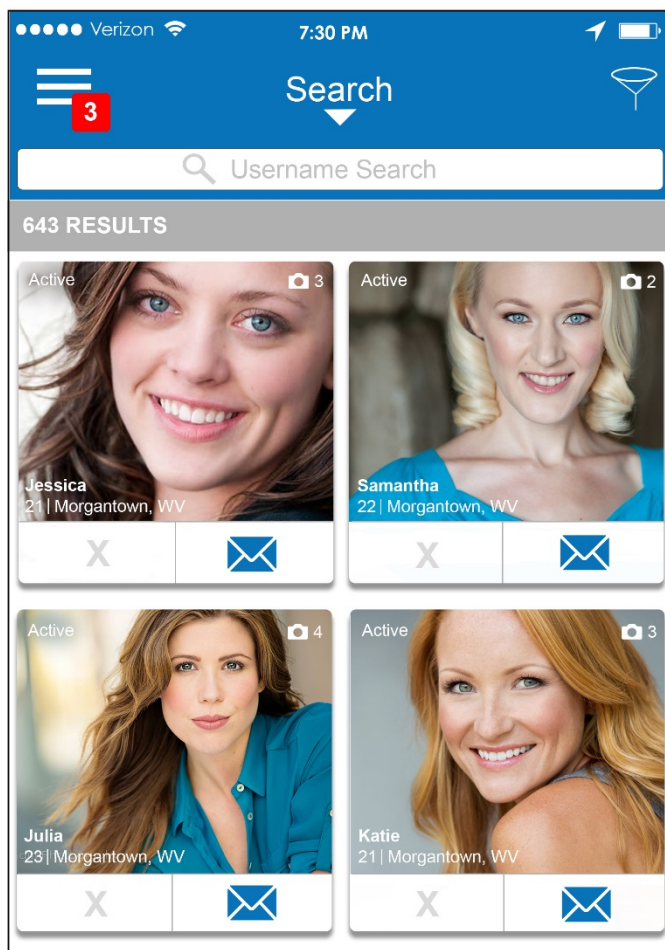
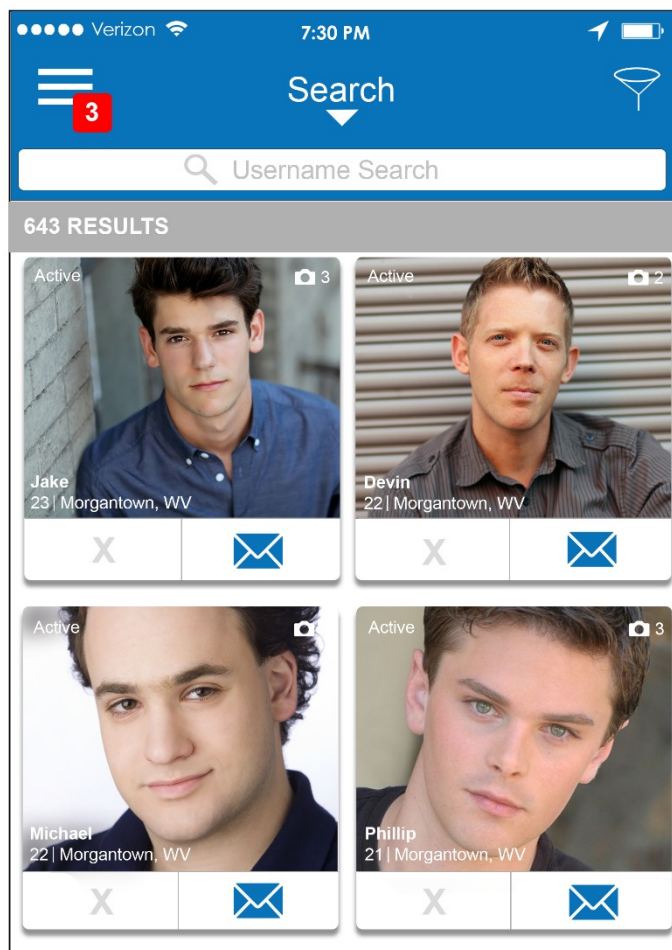
You decide to download a dating application that needs a connection to your Facebook to get started. The Facebook connection populates your profile with your name, age, photos, and common connections as potential matches.

After quickly setting up your profile, the application uses your GPS location to find potential matches. You begin swiping through the profiles with a single swipe right for (like) and swipe left for (dislike). The profiles are short with only first names, ages, mileage from you, common connections, and an optional bio. Using the cards before you place the users you like to the right and the ones you don't to the left.

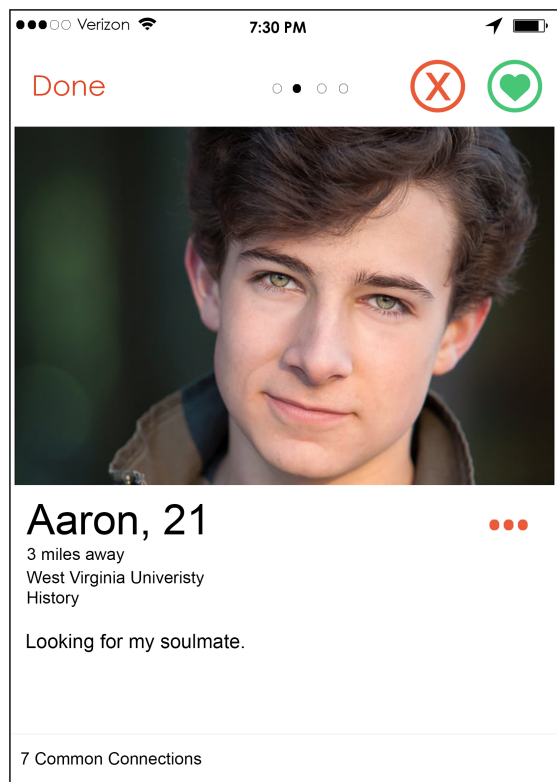
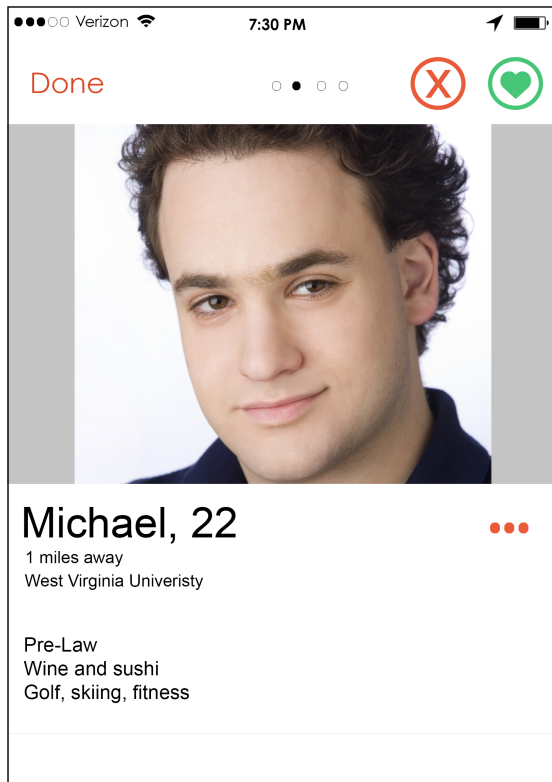
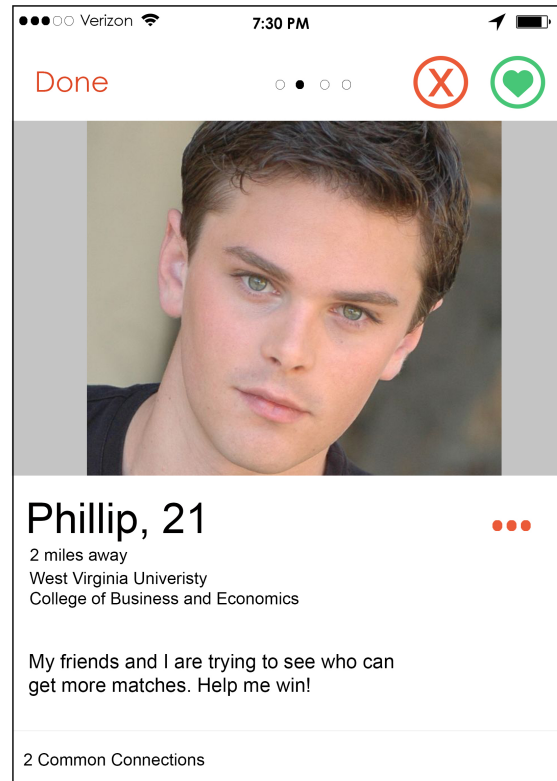
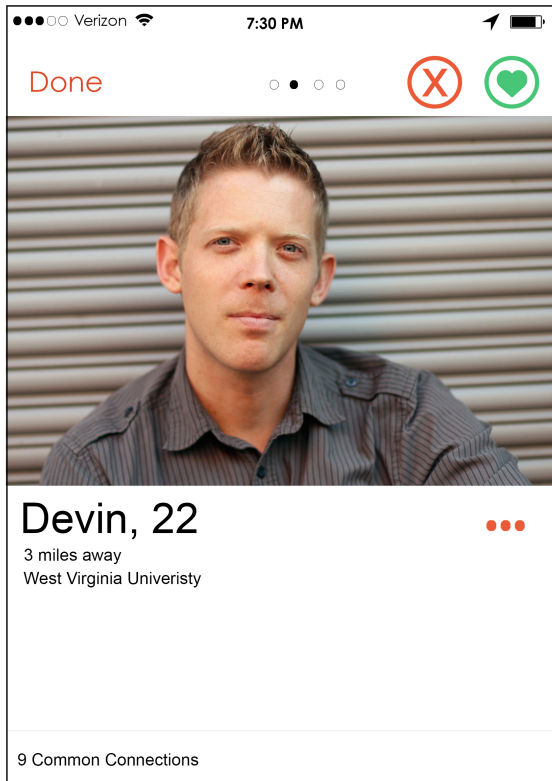
You match with the first person you swiped right, meaning that they liked (or swiped right to) you as well. Conversation is started, and realizing how close you are to each other, you decide to meet.

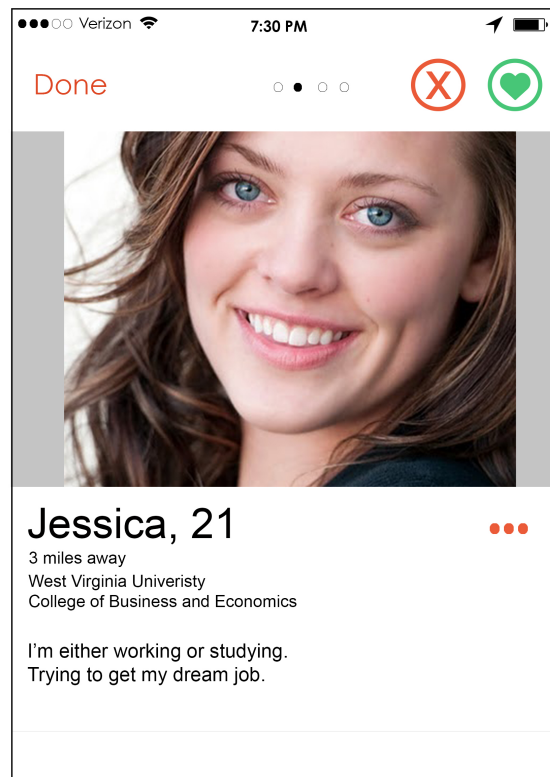
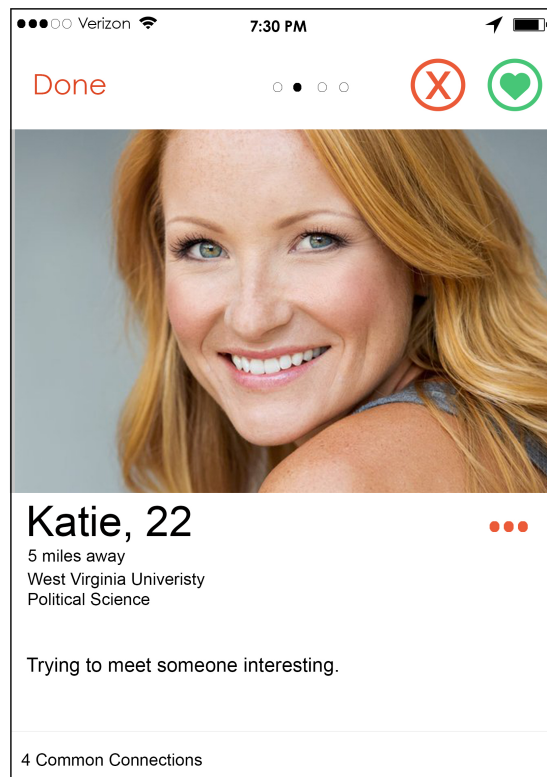
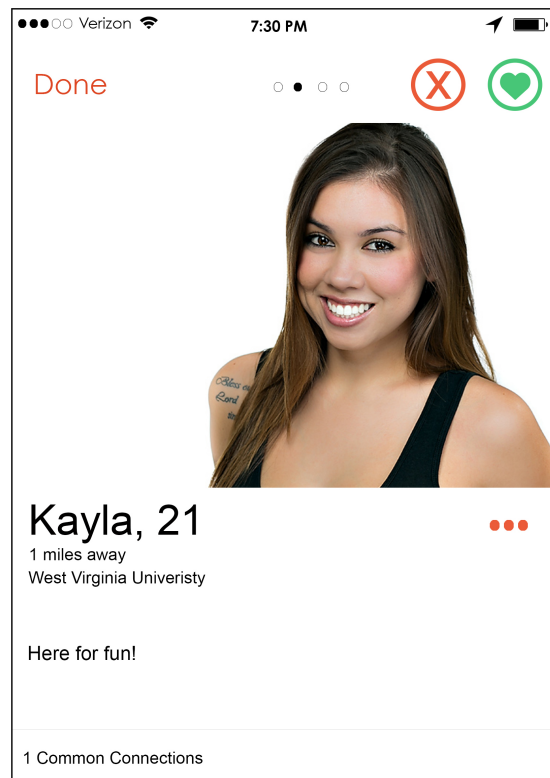
Once finished please answer the questions on the next page based on your experience.

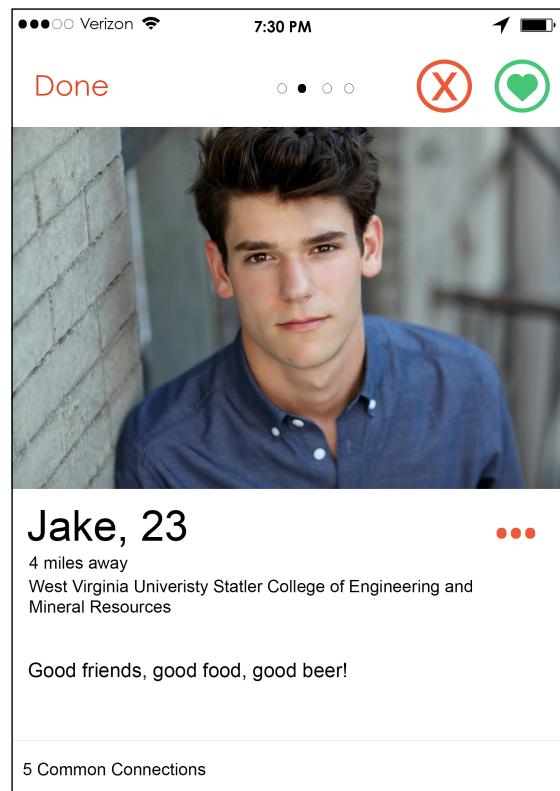
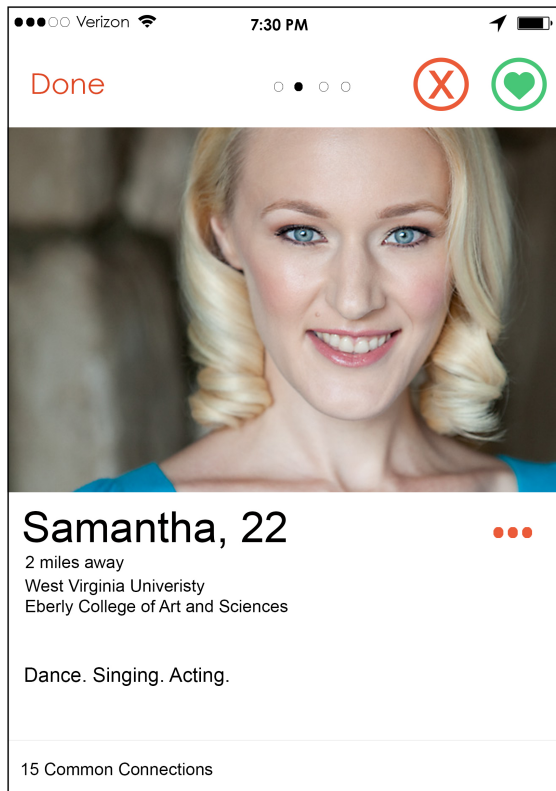
Appendix D: Hypothetical Match.com Profiles



Appendix E: Hypothetical Tinder Profiles







Appendix F: Gratification Questionnaire

On a scale from 1- (Entirely disagree) to 7- (Entirely agree) please consider the following statements and mark (X) your level of agreement.

	Entirely Disagree (1)	Mostly Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Mostly Agree (6)	Entirely Agree (7)
The application is convenient.							
The application is useful.							
The application allows users to receive positive feedback from others.							
The application allows for users to feel an ego boost.							
I can use the application to relax.							
The application can help users unwind.							
I find using the application entertaining.							
The application is enjoyable to use.							
The application can be used to occupy time.							
The application can alleviate boredom.							
The application can be used to interact with others.							
The application can be used to make connections with others							

Please continue to the following page.

Appendix G: Follow-Up Questionnaire

Answer the following questions.

	Male	Female	Unsure
To What gender do you most identify yourself?			
	Yes	No	Unsure
Have you or someone you know ever used Match.com?			
Have you or someone you know ever used Tinder?			
	1	2	
What scenario did you have? (It's at the top of the page connected to the visuals.)			

Please check the race/ethnicity you most identify with.

	African American/African/ Black/ Caribbean
	Asian/ Pacific Islander
	Caucasian
	Hispanic/ Latino
	Native American
	Other
	Prefer not to answer

Thank you for your time and participation.